

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtmnc.org Today's Date: February 28, 2010

The Training of the First Ekklēsia

by Dan Trygg

“But they were continuing unremittingly in the teaching of the apostles, and in the sharing, and in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers. ...⁴⁴ All the ones believing were continuing *upon the same-thing*, and they were having all things common,⁴⁵ and the properties and possessions they were selling and distributing them to all, according as ever anyone was having need; ⁴⁶ daily both perseveringly devoting themselves one-passioned-ly in the temple, and breaking bread in homes, they were taking food in celebration and easily-accessible hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having graciousness toward all the people. But the Master was adding the ones being saved daily *upon the same-thing*.”
Acts 2:42,44-47

From the beginning, the church was an *interactive community*. We do not, in these few verses, hear anything about spiritual gifts, or specific ministries, however. What we are introduced to is a *dynamic that was operating in the early church*, ...one which *created an environment* that both *equipped* and *encouraged* the believers in *doing interactive ministry*. We tend to make things too complicated. Basically, the “secret” of the *health and success of the early church is spelled out for us right here in these verses in Acts 2*. It is *not* that difficult or mysterious. In fact, when the dynamics are clearly grasped and followed by people who are born again of the Spirit, I believe the same wonderful results will begin to happen among *them*.

Why do I think there was a particular “dynamic” that was being followed here? What can be drawn from these verses that will help to clarify what this activity *was*? The reason I believe that the author intended to tell us that there was a particular *strategy of activity* that was being followed, ...a *regimen* which produced effective interactive ministry..., is **because of a repeated phrase which creates a sandwich of verses 44-47**. This phrase I have translated as “**upon the same-thing**”. The words “same-thing” are representative of one word in Greek. Since it is a neuter pronoun, and there is no other neuter noun that it seems to be connected with, I have chosen to render it as a “thing”. The “same-thing” could refer to different possibilities. Some translations have interpreted this as referring to the same location, i.e., they were “all together”. This was not a physical possibility. There were over 3,000 of them (2:41). While they *could* possibly gather as a large group in the temple colonnade, they certainly *could not* all gather in any one home. The context says they were in *many* homes, so “together” does not adequately fit the information the author gives us. If they were not in the same place, then what “thing” are we talking about? I believe **Luke was describing the activity to which they were all devoting themselves**. They were “upon the same-thing” in that they were all giving themselves to the same kind of activities, in response to their newfound faith and the leadership of the apostles.

In the context leading up to these verses, **these new believers had witnessed a miraculous work of God** publicly, and noisily, ...drawing their attention to a group of 120 people who had been apostles and close disciples of the Lord Jesus. Once their attention had been obtained, **a message by Peter had deeply convinced them that they desperately needed to make some changes in their lives to be right with God and to become followers of Jesus**, the rightful King and Messiah of God. Their willingness to look to the apostles for leadership is poignantly expressed in verse 37, “Now when they heard this, they were pierced through the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” **What follows in verses 38-47, then, is not only the immediate verbal reply of Peter**, recorded in 38-40, but also **the resulting response of the people to the ongoing leadership of the apostles, as they attempted to “make disciples” of these new followers of Jesus**. Verse 42 summarizes the *main ingredients* of the apostles’ follow-up counsel. This verse is an overview, or snapshot, of what is described in more detail in verses 44-47, where the “upon-the-same-thing” sandwich is constructed. **The overview of vs. 42 gives us four ingredients or principles which comprised the apostles’ growth program, i.e., teaching, sharing, food, and prayer. These principles are then further “fleshed out” for us in verses 44-47**. What we find in these final verses of the chapter is *how* they were carrying out the *principles* of vs. 42. **This became a pattern of activity which all the new believers were introduced to, and were practicing**. If you were in Jerusalem at this time, and became a believer in Jesus, these verses describe what activities you would be encouraged to participate in as part of your growth and training process.

Devoting oneself -- The word translated in most versions as “they were continually devoting themselves to” (NASB), or “they continued steadfastly in” (KJV), or, as above, “they were continuing unremittingly in” (vs. 42) and “they were perseveringly devoting themselves...in” (vs. 46), is an interesting Greek word. The word, *proskartereō*, is a compound word from *pros*, meaning “towards, near” and *kartereō*, meaning “to be strong; to endure patiently, persist, persevere”, or “to continue to persist in any undertaking or state”. The word *proskartereō* is an intensive combination of these words, meaning “to attach oneself to, to keep close company with, to closely associate with, be loyal to, personally attend to; to occupy oneself diligently with, to pay persistent attention to; to hold fast to, to cling to, to

persevere in, to adhere firmly to, to persist obstinately in, to be faithful to; to spend much time in, to continually be involved with". In general, **it means to "continue to do something with intense effort", with the possible implication of "persisting in the face of difficulty, discomfort or distraction"**. This is the key verb describing the intense effort of disciples to the four principle areas of activity described in the "upon-the-same-thing sandwich".

To the teaching of the apostles -- The word "teaching" can refer to either the *act* of teaching, or to the *content* of what is taught. This means that these believers could occupy themselves diligently with the *ideas* which the apostles taught, ...whether or not the apostles were present. This preserves the relevance of the application for us today. It is not necessary to attend a teaching meeting where an apostle would be speaking. Instead, **attending to, and adhering firmly to, the apostolic doctrine is the important application we can take for ourselves**. Certainly, the apostles were, like their Master before them, teaching the crowds in the Temple. They learned that well from Jesus' example. The other thing they learned from Him, however, was the importance of a small, intimate group where one could easily ask questions and dialogue about spiritual truths and practical applications. Thus, **we see from the very beginning that the apostles directed the new disciples to meet in homes, where there was this opportunity for deeper, more personal and practical discussion**. Dividing 3,000 people up into groups that would fit into homes of the first century would have necessitated forming 100 to 200 small groups, making it very unlikely, again, that the apostles themselves were present at *every* gathering. For the 120 at the upper room, however, this would *not* have been an overwhelming possibility. This double dynamic of large-group and small-group meetings continued for the first couple of years, but by Acts 8 the church could no longer safely meet in the Temple as a large group. It was 300 years before church meetings were commonly any larger than what could meet comfortably in a home. **The strength of the early Christian movement was in the interactive teaching and relationships made possible in the small group**, where questions and discussion were allowed and encouraged. **The content of these meetings always harked back to the apostolic teachings, which remained true to the teachings of Jesus and the OT scriptures**.

To the "sharing" -- The word translated as "sharing" here, and often rendered as "fellowship" in other translations, is the Greek word, *koinonia*. It is related to the word, *koinos*, which means "common, shared". If we take vss. 44-47 as a more detailed picture of vs. 42, then we see that **the "sharing" included both the sharing of hearts, which we might call "fellowship", the sharing of personal needs, and also the responsive sharing of material goods to meet those needs**. Part of the "upon-the-same-thing" mindset and dynamic was that they "held all things common". This was not an administrative thing, or an insistence by the leadership that everyone sell their goods and put them into a common pot. *It is clear that those who had material wealth or possessions still maintained their own control over what belonged to them*. Acts 4:32 explains what was going on, "The multitude of believers were being of one heart and soul, and not anyone of them said of their possessions that they were their own, rather all things were being to them 'common'". Verses 33-37 go on to describe again how people would be *moved* to sell what they had to help others, as people in need came to their attention. In other words, **they considered themselves as stewards of God, ...believing that what they owned was given to them by Him, and was available to Him for His purposes**. When needs came up, and they were impressed to help, they would readily share with one another what they had. Again, this was part of the dynamic for growth which the first believers were consistently attending to. This was, from the beginning, part of their mindset as a disciple of Christ, and they were actively, perseveringly giving themselves to it.

To the "breaking of bread" -- This was *not* "communion", as we might tend to read back from our religious traditions of centuries later. **"Breaking bread" was a common idiom for sharing a meal**. Thus, we should not be surprised to see that vs. 46 reinforces this by saying "they were taking meals together in gladness and easily-accessible hearts". This shared meal became commonly known as a "love feast", and was often a place and time where the Lord's Supper *would* be re-enacted, as a reminder of what He had done for them and who they were in relation to Him. **There was more to the meal than food or liturgy, however. It provided a time where people would relax and share openly with one another**. The festive atmosphere of a meal provided a joyful occasion where it was easy to celebrate the Lord's provision, and the bounty of their meal. Thus, they would eat with "celebration". The Greek word translated as "easily-accessible" is an interesting word picture. It is a negated form of a word meaning, "difficult terrain to travel", hence the dynamic of table fellowship helped produce hearts that were "easy to travel", or openly accessible.

To the prayers -- The word for prayers is the most common word in the NT for this subject. Generally, it refers to intercession, but it is further clarified by the temple attendance in vss. 46 (cf. 3:1), and the "praising God" in vs. 47. **Praise, worship, entreaty and petitions would have all been part of this joint experience together**.